

Redemption 304: Grace and the Covenants (Part Three)



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Grace and the Covenants: Explaining New Testament Contrasts *(Part Three)*

How the Law of Moses Could Be Described as Graceless

We have seen that except for the book of Hebrews, in the New Testament discussions of the sacrifices offered prior to the time of Christ, those sacrifices are not associated with the Law of Moses or its commands. Conversely, except for the book of Hebrews, New Testament discussions of the Law of Moses don't mention the sacrifices offered prior to the time Christ. So, although both sacrifices and the Law of Moses are discussed separately in great detail, they are not discussed together outside of Hebrews. This disassociation between the two is perhaps exactly what we would expect given the fact that the New Testament repeatedly and absolutely describes the Law of Moses as an institution devoid of grace, as unable to bring forgiveness to its adherents, and as dispensing death. The sacrifices offered prior to Christ simply do not fit with such descriptions.

Furthermore in Hebrew, the one book of the New Testament that does mention the Law of Moses and sacrifices in direct relation to one another, we find a virtual dissertation of the insufficiency and ineffectiveness of the animal sacrifices commanded by Moses' Law. While the animal sacrifices are described as necessary and as commanded by Moses, the necessity for such sacrifices is equally depicted as predictive, illustrative, temporary, and insufficient. Likewise, Christ's death was what they predicted and illustrated, what brought the need for them to an end, and what finally satisfied their purpose and function once and for all. In this sense, we can firmly conclude that although their effectiveness was real, it was conditional and provisional based on the eventual death of the Messiah.

Consequently, to a significant degree this explains how the New Testament authors could repeatedly describe the Law of Moses as without grace or forgiveness and as merely dispensing death. If you remove the death of the Messiah from the equation, animal sacrifices become utterly impotent and permanently insufficient for atonement. So, whether they were writing apologetic arguments to persuade their fellow Jews about Christ or explaining to Gentile converts why the Law of Moses was no longer in effect, the Jewish authors of the New Testament could describe the sacrifices of the Law of Moses as utterly ineffective for anyone who did not accept Christ. Furthermore, they could

describe all the sacrifices of the Law of Moses as having become universally ineffective after the sacrifice of Christ had been accomplished. Therefore, the coming of Christ had removed all potential for grace and forgiveness from the Law of Moses, even the temporarily effective provisions exercised by means of animal sacrifices. What remained of the Law of Moses was truly graceless and useful only for dispensing death. And even in a timeless sense, without Christ's death the Law of Moses was never capable of providing any measure of gracious forgiveness. Apart from Christ, it was never anything more than a means of dispensing death and punishment.

But as we've hinted, this seems to be only a partial explanation. To fully account for the New Testament's absolute denials regarding grace and forgiveness in the Law of Moses, we need to go a little farther in our understanding of Jewish perceptions by the time of the first century AD.

Even if we regard the Law of Moses as devoid of grace and forgiveness for anyone who ultimately removes Christ's sacrifice from the equation, what about all the Israelites living under the Law of Moses until the time of Christ? And even though we established that God's acceptance of animal sacrifices was rooted entirely in their function as an instructional analogy regarding the need for Christ, we still end up with a situation in which the animal sacrifices are regarded as temporarily effective until the time of Christ's death. How else could the author of Hebrews write in chapter 9:22 that "almost all things are by the law purged with blood and without shedding of blood is no remission?" Or how could he write even more clearly in chapter 9:23 that, "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these?" Such statements demand that God did indeed count "all things" as "purged with blood" from animals and as "purified with these" animal sacrifices under the times of the Law of Moses. And we have also seen how the book of Hebrews directly describes these sacrifices as commandments of the Law of Moses.

No doubt God counted these substitute sacrifices a temporarily sufficient because he had commanded them and ordained them as illustrations pointing to Christ. But, wouldn't these considerations require that there was grace and forgiveness under the Law of Moses and, in fact, that the Law of Moses was a means of dispensing grace and forgiveness, not just death, even if only temporarily and conditionally based on the death of Christ? How then could the authors of the New Testament regard the Law of Moses as utterly without grace or forgiveness? (This seems even more pressing when the context of such New Testament descriptions of the Law of Moses appears to be more general and does not appear to relate specifically to unbelieving Jews.)

Once we acknowledge that the New Testament affirms the temporary effectiveness of animal sacrifices preconditioned on Jesus' death, there seems to be only one way to explain the New Testament's absolute characterization of the Law of Moses as without grace or forgiveness. The Jewish authors of the New Testament must have viewed the Law of Moses and the priestly sacrificial system

as conceptually distinct, thereby making it possible to refer to the Law of Moses without automatically including the priestly sacrificial system. Here there are two items to address.

First, in the opening pages of this paper, we refer to material from our “Priesthood and the Kinsman Redeemer” study. In that study, we demonstrate that the bible records the existence of a priesthood offering sacrifices going all the way back to the early chapters of Genesis, long before the Law of Moses or the Levitical priesthood. In this historical context, which is presented and chronicled by Moses himself in the book of Genesis, the Levitical priests are simply the heirs of a much older tradition. In fact, not only is Melchizedek identifiable as Noah’s son Shem, but he is described as a priest who rules as king over the Canaanites, just as Noah predicted in Genesis 9:24-26. Furthermore, Abraham is descended from Shem and Shem continued to live some 500 years after the flood including for the first 150 years of Abraham’s life (Genesis 11:7-26). In Genesis 14, Abraham is depicted as inheriting this office from Melchizedek (Shem). And in Genesis 18, Abraham is depicted as carrying out this priestly office as he intercedes before the Lord on behalf of the righteous in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In this historical context, ultimately the Levites are seen as merely the latest heirs to whom this priesthood is distributed. Moreover, in this light, the Law of Moses becomes the means of distributing the historically and conceptually distinct institution of the priesthood rather than as the origin of the priesthood or as consubstantial with the priesthood. It is this historical backdrop recorded by Moses himself that provides the foundational separation between the Law of Moses as an institution and the priestly sacrificial system as an institution.

Second, the book of Hebrews does describe the Levitical priesthood and its sacrifices as commandments of the Law of Moses. In other words, they were not just concurrent with the Law of Moses, nor were they entirely separate from the Law of Moses. Since the New Testament admits that the Law of Moses contained commands regarding the priesthood and the sacrifices, doesn’t that require us to abandon a theoretical distinction between Moses’ Law and the priestly system?

Not really. There are several reasons for this.

Number one, we have already established (particularly in our “Priesthood and the Kinsman Redeemer” study) that the system of priestly sacrifices did exist long before Moses. This fact alone substantiates a basis for conceptually distinguishing between the two. They cannot be utterly one and the same given the fact that one preceded the other by thousands of years of human history. So, the only question is whether the Law of Moses should be viewed as erasing that distinction once the Law comes into existence.

Number two, the Law of Moses was in a very large sense viewed by the Jewish people simply as a form of national government categorically comparable (although, of course, superior) to the governments of other nations. In fact, this

conceptualization of the Law of Moses is presented quite clearly in the New Testament.

We saw this already earlier on when we reviewed Paul's epistle to the Romans, which was written to a community of Christians living in the capital city of the leading empire of the world at that time. When writing to what would have at least included Gentile Christians, Paul begins by instructing them to obey the civic authorities and to pay their taxes.

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto **the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.** **2** Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: **4** For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; **for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.** **5** Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. **6** For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. **7** Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. **8** Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law (3551). **9** For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. **10** Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the **law (3551).**

First, we shouldn't be confused about the Paul's characterization in verses 1-2 that all authorities are "ordained of God." Deuteronomy 32:8 declares, "When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." Now, the obvious point here is that the nations were divided by God in Genesis 11, which describes the Tower of Babel. This is long before Jacob (later Israel) was even born, let alone before he had children of his own. Certain Septuagint renderings of this passage conclude either with "angels of God" or "sons of God" instead of "children of Israel."

In fact, when we compare this to parallel statements elsewhere in Deuteronomy, we find that Deuteronomy 4:19 refers to the nations being divided to "the host of heaven," whom they worship. Passages like Deuteronomy 12:2, 12:30, and 29:18 openly describe the other nations serving false gods. In fact, in our "Prophetic Symbols" study, particularly the segment entitled, "Daniel 9 and 10 (Part 2)" we survey not only Daniel 10:12-13,20-21, but many New Testament passages that attest to angels ruling over the nations, including Luke 4:5-8. Interestingly, Luke 4 recounts interplay between Jesus and the devil directly based on the content of these passages in Deuteronomy. Other New Testament passages that directly

attest to God apportioning of the nations to angels include John 12:31, John 14:30, John 16:11, Romans 8:38, Ephesians 3:9-10, 6:11-12, Colossians 1:16, 2:15, 1 Corinthians 2:6, and 2 Corinthians 4:4. Under the general authority of angels, various men held power in these nations, just as various kings ruled in Israel and Judah over its history, including both good and wicked men.

Consequently, Paul's mention of God ordaining these governments and rulers should not mislead us into thinking that Paul is speaking here of the Law of Moses. To the contrary, Paul is speaking to Christians in Rome who lived under Roman, not Jewish, rulers and laws. And Paul is advising them concerning their submission to those Roman governing authorities, which is clear enough from the general nature of phrases like verse 7, which reads, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." This is not meant only with regard to Jewish rulers governing by the Law of Moses in the land of Israel, but all "higher powers" anywhere.

Second, notice verse 8 where Paul states that when we love our neighbor, we fulfill the law. Now, if you stopped reading here, you would presume that "law" simply refers to national laws just as the preceding verses of this chapter pertain to obeying "rulers" over the nations in which we live. Only when you continue reading into verse 9 do you find reason to associate the term "law" in verse 8 with the Law of Moses more specifically. So, here we arrive at a potential crossroads. Do we sever verse 8 from the preceding verses so that it no longer refers to the laws of the nations, contrary to the flow of the context? Or do we sever the word "law" in verse 8 from verses 9-10 where it clearly refers to the Law of Moses as demonstrated by the inclusion of two examples from the Ten Commandments?

The answer, of course, is that we don't sever the term "law" in verse 8 from either. As we can see from the Strong's Concordance number behind the word "law" in both verse 8 and verse 10, Paul is using the same Greek word to refer to the Law of Moses and to the laws of the nations in general. The term "law" in verse 8 functions as a bridge conceptually connecting the Law of Moses in verse 9 to the civil governments of the nations in the preceding verses. If we attempt to avoid this fact, we are left with the question of why in the world Paul is mentioning the Law of Moses at all in a context arguing that Christians in Rome need to obey the laws of the various Roman rulers? What possible relevance does the Law of Moses have to that topic? But the fact is that the Law of Moses works largely as an example of national laws, which allows Paul to demonstrate how practicing love enables us to be obedient to whatever laws and rulers under which we live. However, this context demands that Paul viewed the Law of Moses as categorically parallel to the laws and governments of other nations.

Third, this conclusion is further proved by comparing Paul's description of the authority of the Roman rulers under which his audience lived. Consider this description of the secular governments' authority to condemn men and punish evil in chapter 13 to Paul's description of the Law of Moses in chapters 3, 4, 7 and 8.

In Romans 13:4, secular governments work wrath for evildoers. In Romans 4:15, the Law of Moses is said to work wrath upon those who transgress it.

Romans 13:4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; **for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.**

Romans 4:15 **Because the law worketh wrath:** for where no law is, there is no transgression.

In Romans 13:2, those who disobey the secular governments receive damnation. In Romans 3:19, the purpose of the Law of Moses is to demonstrate the guilt of sinners.

Romans 13:1 **Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.** For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 **Whosoever therefore resisteth the power,** resisteth the ordinance of God: and **they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (2917).**

Romans 3:19 Now we know that **what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that** every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world may become guilty (5267) before God.**

In Romans 13:3-4, the secular governments are said to be a “terror” or “fear” to those who do evil because they “bear the sword,” a phrase which certainly hints at the idea of executing criminals. In Romans 7:5-6, Paul speaks of our need to be delivered from the Law of Moses, in which we are condemned to die because of our sins. Likewise, in Romans 8:1-2, Paul speaks of Christians being freed from the condemnation of the Law of Moses, which he refers to summarily as “the law of sin and death.”

Romans 13:3 **For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.** Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; **for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.**

Romans 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, **the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.** 6 But now we are **delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held;** that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now **no condemnation (2631) to them which are in Christ Jesus,** who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath **made me free from the law of sin and death.**

It is also noteworthy that the “damnation” in Romans 13:2 is the Greek word “krima” (Strong’s No. 2817) and the word “condemnation” in Romans 8:1 is the closely related compound word “katakrima” (Strong’s No. 2631). Clearly, even within the book of Romans, Paul’s discussion of the governments of the Gentiles nations in chapter 13 is directly parallel to his description of the Law of Moses, which was the governing authority for the nation of Israel. These details in Romans confirm the conclusion that New Testament Jewish authors, such as Paul, viewed the Law of Moses as categorically parallel to the laws and governments of other nations.

Now that we’ve established this conclusion, we can discuss its relevance to our study. As a governing institution, the Law of Moses automatically took authority over virtually all aspects of human society. The priestly sacrificial system was just one of these preexisting, well-established societal institutions. For illustration, we might consider a few other examples in order to demonstrate how complete conceptual distinction remains between government and other societal institutions even when those other institutions are understood to be firmly and legitimately under the authority and regulation of the government.

Before the Law of Moses, the book of Genesis records the initiation of at least three key aspects or institutions of human life, items which became cornerstones of all human society. These three institutions are marriage, food, and work.

Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. 8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. 10 And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. 11 The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12 And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. 13 And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. 14 And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates. 15 And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. 18 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. 19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. 20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh

instead thereof; 22 **And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.** 23 **And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.** 24 **Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.**

Genesis 2 recounts the creation of Adam. In verse 8, God plants a garden in Eden. Verse 15 connects God planting this garden to God giving man the work of “dressing and keeping” the garden. Even before sin, God gave man work. Verse 16 then immediately connects man’s work with his reward, which is the right to take the fruit of that labor and eat. Even before sin, God gave man the practice of enjoying a meal from the sustenance of the earth. In fact, later in Genesis 14:18 Melchizedek, the high priest of Jerusalem, has a meal with Abraham and the ritualistic nature of this meal corroborates the institutional status of eating even by that early point. Returning to Genesis 2, in verses 22-24 God creates woman and gives her to Adam as a helpmate. And from the famous phrase “This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” in verse 23 comes the foundation of marriage in verse 24, which states, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.” Later in Genesis 4:1, we see that Adam and Eve do come together just as Genesis 2:24 indicates, resulting in the birth of Cain. Jesus cites these verses as the basis of marriage in such passages as Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6-9. Clearly it was long before the Law of Moses that God gave man the institution of marriage.

From that time forward, marriage, work, and eating the fruits of one’s labor have been hallmark institutions of all human society. And from the moment of its inauguration at Mount Sinai onward, the Law of Moses began to govern all three of these well-established, conceptually distinct aspects of society. Commands were given governing marriage, outlawing marriage between certain parties (some of which were previously allowed) and regulating divorce. Other commands were given governing the consumption of food, outlawing certain foods that could previously be eaten and even requiring certain foods to be eaten at certain festivals according to precise schedules. And still other commands were given regarding work, restricting when men could work throughout the week, over the 50-year Jubilee cycle, and even which crops could be planted in the same field.

Yet when we think of the Law of Moses, we don’t equate it with marriage or the origin of marriage. We don’t equate it with work or with the origin of work. And we don’t equate it with eating meals or the origin of eating meals. All of these things, including the fundamental institution of marriage, remain both historically and conceptually utterly distinct from the Law of Moses even though the Law of Moses contains very thorough commands regarding each of them. Put another way, the Law of Moses is not synonymous with marriage, work, or eating meals even though it prescribed ordinances governing such distinct institutions which predated it.

Consequently, since the priestly sacrificial system also dates back to the earliest days of Genesis (as established in our “Priesthood and the Kinsman Redeemer”

study), there is no reason why the Law of Moses and the priestly sacrificial system could not remain entirely conceptually distinct in the minds of the Jewish people such as the authors of the New Testament. Just as the Law of Moses had commandments which governed marriage without equating the two or automatically evoking the one whenever the other is mentioned, in the same manner the fact that the Law of Moses had commands governing the priestly sacrificial system would not cause the Jewish people to equate the two or to automatically evoke one when mentioning the other.

This underlying perception is what provided the crucial underpinning for New Testament authors to describe the Law of Moses an institution devoid of grace and forgiveness despite their first-hand participation in the sacrificial system at the Temple in Jerusalem and their thorough knowledge of the Law of Moses as evidenced by their frequent quotation of the Old Testament. The Jewish authors of the New Testament were by no means ignorant of the 60 references to sacrifices and offerings in connection to atonement in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. They simply viewed the Law of Moses as the governing institution and they viewed the priestly sacrificial system as one of many, pre-existing, conceptually distinct institutions that came to be governed by the Law of Moses' many commands. Consequently, they could speak of the Law of Moses as essentially a system of laws to identify criminal activity and execute punishment without taking into account the priestly system that Moses' Law governed.

In fact, the New Testament plainly speaks of the Law of Moses separately from the priestly system in some of the same books we've been examining throughout this paper.

Romans 9 lists several items that are part of the heritage of the Israelites.

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: 4 **Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service (2999) of God, and the promises; 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.**

Verses 4-5 recount how the Israelites had received God's adoption. They were the only nation chosen by God. They received God's glory, God's tangible presence that came and dwelled in the tabernacle and in the Temple. No other nation had experienced God's presence in such a manner. They had received the covenants, which contained both promises and commands. While many nations had inherited the covenant God made with Noah after the Flood, the covenant with Abraham came only through Isaac and Jacob, not Ishmael. And the Israelites also received the covenant God made with David that an heir of David's would forever rule the nation of Israel. While this promise will one day impact the whole world, God never made any such covenant with the kings of other nations. The patriarchs belong to Israel. While anyone descended from Ishmael or Esau could claim Abraham as his father, only the Israelites were descended from Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob. The Israelites also received the promises of God, particularly those mentioned in Romans 4 that Abraham would inherit the world. The only way that Gentiles can participate in this alongside the Israelites is through Jesus Christ. No direct covenant exists between God and Gentiles apart from Israel. And Christ Jesus is an Israelite, descended from David through his mother Mary. The Messiah was not born as part of any other nation.

But notice that there are two items in this list that we have not yet mentioned. Right next to each other in verse 4 are “the giving of the law” and “the service of God.” Although the English doesn’t convey it very well, the underlying Greek word for “service” is “latreia” (Strong’s No. 2999), which refers to “the service and worship of God according to the requirements of Levitical law” or more simply “to perform sacred services” such as presiding over sacrifices, rituals, and festivals. In fact, Romans 12:1 uses the word “latreia” to refer to “our bodies as a living sacrifice.” And chapter 9:1-6 of Hebrews, another central book in our study, uses “latreia” to refer to the service performed by the Israelites in the tabernacle (and ultimately the Temple). Consequently, there can be no question that Romans 9:4 identifies the Law of Moses separately from the priestly system. In fact, according to Romans 9, the priestly system was as conceptually and historically distinct from the Law of Moses as the patriarchs, the presence of God in the tabernacle and Temple, the Abrahamic covenant and promises (see Galatians 3:5-18), and the covenant with David which came much later in history.

Although it was governed by the Law of Moses, Hebrews also speaks of the Levitical priesthood as a clearly, conceptually distinct institution from the Law of Moses.

Hebrews 7:5 And verily **they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood**, have a commandment to take tithes of the people **according to the law**, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham...11 **If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,)** what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? 12 **For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law**...20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: 21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) 22 **By so much was Jesus made a surety (1450) of a better testament.** 23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: 24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

In fact, Hebrews 7 affirms this conceptual distinction more than once.

First, verse 11 refers to how the people of Israel “received the Law” while “under” the “Levitical priesthood.” Such phrasing clearly necessitates that the author viewed the Levitical priesthood as a separate entity that existed independently from Moses’ Law. Otherwise, this verse would essentially state

that the people of Israel received the Law of Moses while operating under the Law of Moses. In other words, without the conceptual distinction firmly in place that allowed Jewish authors to speak of the Law of Moses without automatically invoking the Levitical priesthood, verse 11 would be reduced to nonsense.

Second, verse 12 declares that “the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.” The change in the Law of Moses is required, not because the two are equated with each other, but because the Law contained commands governing the priesthood. Consequently, to change the priesthood would require some change in the status quo regarding the Law of Moses. But the bottom line here is that the author is again listing the Levitical priesthood and the Law of Moses separately. They are closely related, even intertwined, but they can be distinguished as two different institutions.

At this point, another important question arises. If the system of priestly service is conceptually distinct from the Law of Moses, is it likewise conceptually distinct from the New Covenant?

The answer here is yes. In fact, the relationship between the New Covenant and the priesthood is very similar to the relationship between the Law of Moses and the priesthood. Like the Law of Moses, the New Covenant incorporates the pre-existing priestly institution, modifies it to suit its own historic purposes, and regulates it afterward according to God’s new arrangement with mankind through Israel in Jesus Christ.

And we don’t have to look far. Hebrew 9 provides affirmation of this fact.

Hebrews 9:1 Then verily **the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service (2999), and a worldly sanctuary...11 But Christ being come an high priest** of good things to come, by a **greater and more perfect tabernacle**, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but **by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place**, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

Of course, Hebrews 7 (cited above) also contains similar indications. But notice the parallel between verses 1 and 11 of chapter 9. Although the comparison spans 11 verses, we can see that the chapter begins by referring to how the first covenant, which is the Law of Moses, had “service.” As indicated earlier, the Greek word here is once again “latreia” (Strong’s 2999) just as in Romans 9:4. As we can see, at the heart of this passage is a parallel that describes how the presence of priestly service in the Law of Moses requires that priestly service is also present in the New Covenant. Consequently, it is with good reason that we have concluded that the relationship between the New Covenant and the priesthood is parallel to the type of relationship that existed between the Law of Moses and the priesthood.

Of course, the application of the title, “high priest” to Jesus Christ in verse 11 implies that there are other, subordinate priests in the New Covenant as well, just

as there were in the Law of Moses. Those subordinate priests are none other than all the saints of God, not only from the Old Testament period but also including Christians.

Peter affirms this fact openly in his epistle, referring to the Church as “a holy priesthood” and a “royal priesthood” through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, **are** built up a spiritual house, **an holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God **by Jesus Christ**...**9** **But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Similarly, in Revelation 1:6 John refers to the saints (including Christians) as “kings and priests.”

Revelation 1:6 And **hath made us kings and priests** unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

In chapter 5, John also refers to those who have been redeemed by the Lamb of God as coming from every nation and as having been made “kings and priests.”

Revelation 5:9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and **hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;** **10** **And hast made us unto our God kings and priests:** and we shall reign on the earth.

As indicated in Hebrews 7:5 and 11, the Law of Moses only allowed Israelites who were Levites descended from Aaron to be priests. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, even as recorded in Hebrews 7:13. In order for an Israelite from a different tribe to become a priest, there had to be a change in the status quo regarding the Law of Moses. In the same way that the New Covenant entails new protocols allowing a non-Levitical priest, it also allows non-Israelite priests, men from every kindred, tongue, people, and nation just as Revelation 5 says. As we have said, the New Testament incorporates the pre-existing institution of the priesthood and modifies it according to its own parameters and historical setting according to God’s strategic plan, just as Moses’ Law did.

Revelation 20 likewise describes those persecuted by the beast as becoming “priests of God and of Christ” who “shall reign with him.”

Revelation 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and **I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.** **5** But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.

This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but **they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.**

In fact, it is with our priestly service in mind that in Romans 12:1 Paul instructs Christians to offer our bodies as “a living sacrifice,” which is our “latreia” or priestly service. Section four of our study entitled “Priesthood and the Kinsman Redeemer” has much more to say about the New Testament priesthood. But for now it is sufficient to say that the New Testament does most certainly relate to the priestly system in much the same way as the Law of Moses did. Like the Law of Moses, the New Covenant incorporates the pre-existing priestly institution, modifies it to suit its own historic purposes, and regulates it afterward according to God’s new arrangement with mankind through Israel in Jesus Christ.

Death and Punishment under the New Covenant

Just as the Law of Moses and the New Covenant both incorporated the pre-existing priestly sacrificial system, like the Law of Moses the New Covenant also contains protocols regarding punishment for those who disregard its commandments. As we have seen, the punitive aspects of the Law of Moses are a key reason why New Testament authors distinguished the Law of Moses, which they characterized as covenant without grace or forgiveness, from the New Covenant, which they characterized as full of grace and forgiveness. Consequently, the critical question is why the inclusion of disciplinary measures does not result in characterizing the New Covenant as an institution devoid of grace and forgiveness just as it did the Law of Moses?

There are two reasons why this characterization does not apply to the New Covenant.

First, under the Law of Moses the priestly sacrificial system and civil governance are separated by a strong conceptual and historically rooted gap that was recognized by the Jewish people at the time of the first century. But it isn’t simply that the distinction can be theoretically conceived of, nor is it simply that the priestly sacrificial system predated the Law of Moses. Beyond these truths, the Law of Moses itself also deliberately codified this separation of punitive governance and priestly atonement.

We recall from earlier how Romans 13:1-10 referred to the Gentile authorities that governed the Roman Christians using the same term “law” as its reference to the Law of Moses (and without any distinction). We also saw specifically how Paul’s description of the function of Gentile governments perfectly paralleled his core descriptions of the Law of Moses in Romans 3:19, 4:15, 7:5-6, and 8:1-2 as executing wrath, as demonstrating the rightful condemnation of sinners, and as administering the punishment of death (“the sword”) to guilty persons.

Under the Law of Moses, such authority was wielded in some sense by family or tribal patriarchs and perhaps most prominently by the judges up until the time of King Saul. From that point forward, it was wielded by the kings of Israel. On the other hand, the priestly authority to intercede by prayers and obtain atonement by sacrifices was assigned exclusively to the Aaronic line of Levites as specifically assigned by Moses himself. As a result, the two groups did not overlap generally speaking. Levites are not generally found among the judges or kings of Israel or Judah. And the judges and kings came from other tribes, not the tribe of Levi. Consequently, men who held the punitive authority did not exercise priestly office and men who held priestly office did not hold punitive authority. (See note below.) And in this way, particularly by assigning the priesthood to the Levites only, the Law of Moses codified a distinction between judicial power and priestly sacrificial work.

Such separation is not found in the New Covenant in which both forms of authority are inherently vested in the same man, Jesus Christ, who functions as king and lawgiver as well as high priest. In other words, unlike the Law of Moses, in the New Covenant there are no separate institutions for punitive government and priestly intercession. As a result, the codified, conceptual and historical distinction which allows for the Law of Moses to be discussed as a civil government without invoking the separate institution of sacrificial priesthood does not exist under the New Covenant. Therefore, unlike the Law of Moses, it is not possible to discuss the New Covenant without invoking an institution of sacrificial atonement. Consequently, the presence of punitive measures in the New Covenant does not render the New Covenant solely as a graceless administration of punishment in the way that one could describe the Law of Moses from which the atoning system could be so readily distinguished historically, conceptually, and institutionally.

(NOTE: Of course, Eli and particularly King David stand out as exceptions to this rule. However, the mandate for David's operation as priest comes from outside the Law of Moses. Instead, it stems from David's likely descent from Melchizedek through Judah's marriage to Tamar. In this sense as well as many others, David functions as a predictive precursor to Jesus Christ. And ultimately, David does not in any sense contradict the distinction between priests and government codified by the Law of Moses. These facts are explored in section three of our study entitled "Priesthood and the Kinsman Redeemer.")

Second, although the Law of Moses certainly administered a variety of punishments for differing offenses, as we saw in our section entitled, "Point No. 3: The Law of Moses Was an Instrument of Death and Punishment," the New Testament authors focused their characterization of the Law of Moses on the death penalty. From Romans 1-2, 4-5, 7-8, 1 Corinthians 15:56, 2 Corinthians 3, Galatians 2-3, Ephesians 2, Colossians 2, and Hebrews 2, we have repeatedly seen the New Testament authors describing the gracelessness of the Law of Moses in terms of its dispensing death to sinners.

Moreover, the particulars of the death penalty are important. Although by no means all sins, under the Law of Moses many sins (including most but not all of the Ten Commandments) were punishable by death. Four relevant lines of contrast emerge from this fact.

Number one, the Law of Moses restricted atonement by means of priestly sacrifice to only certain types of sins. The New Covenant removed this restriction and made it possible for the forgiveness and atonement of any type of sin. (Note: The singular and peculiar exception to this is, of course, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. But the text describing this exception, Matthew 12:31, also proves the general rule that all other sins can be forgiven under the New Covenant.)

Number two, although both the Law of Moses and the New Covenant ultimately result in death for those who disregard their precepts, the Law of Moses required this death to be immediate, which has direct relevance to the issues of grace and forgiveness.

Deuteronomy 17:6 At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. 7 The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.

Deuteronomy 19:15 One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

As soon as the accused was found guilty, they were to be put to death virtually on the spot. Chapter 17 paints a picture in which the hands of the witnesses initiate execution with all haste as soon as their testimony has been established. There is no opportunity given for repentance and avoiding the punishment. This lack of opportunity for any forgiveness further explains in very practical terms why the New Testament described the Law of Moses as without grace or forgiveness.

For the sake of ease, it might be tempting here to simply deny that the New Covenant includes any version of a death penalty as a consequence for sin and unbelief. However, it must be acknowledged that the New Testament does, in fact, retain a place for the execution of the wicked as a deterrent to continued sin and unbelief. But the details are critical concerning the contrast to the Law of Moses and the issue of grace and forgiveness.

The execution of the wicked is demonstrated to be part of the New Covenant in four ways. (For the sake of brevity, not all of the explanatory evidence supporting these points will be included here although such evidence is outlined in various other general studies on the topics of eschatology and cosmology.)

A few items should be stated up front for the sake of clarity. Number one, as will be seen in the discussion below, the New Covenant does not authorize Christians

to put each other or anyone else to death, unlike the Law of Moses. Number two, both believers and unbelievers were expected to die from various natural or unjust causes in the process of time prior to the return of Christ. However, this was simply a matter or due course, not the implementation of church discipline, nor was it a directly dispensed, divine consequence for particular sins. Nevertheless, beyond the expectation that death would occur in general by undirected natural or common causes, under the New Covenant death did have place as a deterrent and consequence for sin and unbelief.

First, the New Testament states that unbelievers will be denied eternal life, which at least indirectly implies that death will remain a consequence of unbelief. For without eternal life, the only alternative is death at some point and in some form or fashion (either physical death or what the New Testament refers to as the “Second Death”). (Below we will see that the manner of death differs significantly under the New Covenant in terms of both timing and character and briefly discuss what the “Second Death” is.)

John 5:21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them*; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. **22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:** **23** That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. **24** Verily, verily, I say unto you, **He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.** **25** Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. **26** For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; **27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also,** because he is the Son of man. **28** Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, **29** And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. **30** I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

John 8:51 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.**

Second, the New Testament also directly states that those who continue in unbelief and sinful behavior will not be spared from death as a consequence.

John 8:21 Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, **and shall die in your sins:** whither I go, ye cannot come. **22** Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. **23** And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. **24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.**

Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? **Shall we continue in sin**, that grace may abound?...10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. 11 Likewise **reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin**, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. 12 **Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body**, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof...16 Know ye not, that **to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death**, or of obedience unto righteousness?...19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; **even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness...**21 **What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death...**23 **For the wages of sin is death**; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 8:2 **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death...**5 **For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh**; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. 6 **For to be carnally minded is death**; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace...13 **For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.**

2 Corinthians 7:9 Now **I rejoice**, not that ye were made sorry, but **that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner**, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. 10 **For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.**

Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; **God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.** 8 **For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption**; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

James 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 14 **But every man is tempted**, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 **Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.** 16 **Do not err**, my beloved brethren.

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. **He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.**

Third, when Christ Jesus physically returns to the earth to rule as king, not only Christ himself but also his followers will act to execute the wicked in a single, climactic event to purge the earth at the onset of Jesus' earthly reign. At this point, the saints of all ages will have been transformed and made immortal like angels and gathered together in the clouds of heaven alongside Christ himself. At this time, Christ will kill the ungodly that remain on earth by means of a fiery

destruction that will parallel the death of the ungodly by water at the time of the flood. (Joel 2 and Revelation 19 provide strong indications that this fiery destruction will be at least in part implemented through the immortalized saints who operate as an army of angels engulfed in flame, particular in Jerusalem and Israel.)

2 Peter 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, **4** And saying, **Where is the promise of his coming?** for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation. **5** For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: **6** Whereby **the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:** **7** **But the heavens and the earth, which are now,** by the same word are kept in store, **reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.** **8** But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **9** The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. **10** But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which **the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.** **11** *Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, **12** Looking for and hasting unto **the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?**

Joel 2:1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for **the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;** **2** A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: **a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like,** neither shall be any more after it, *even* to the years of many generations. **3** **A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.** **4** The appearance of them *is* as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. **5** Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, **like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array.** **6** Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. **7** **They shall run like mighty men;** they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: **8** Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and **when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded.** **9** They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; **they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.** **10** The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: **the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining:** **11** **And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army:** for his camp *is* very great: **for he is strong that**

executeth his word: for the day of the LORD *is* great and very terrible; and **who can abide it?**

Revelation 2:23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: **and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.**

Revelation 18:8 Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: **for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.**

Revelation 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and **his name is called The Word of God.** 14 And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. 17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; 18 **That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.** 19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. 20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21 **And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.**

Fourth, the New Testament describes the fate of wicked men in what is called the Second Death. This second death represents exclusion from the kingdom from God in a Lake of Fire that surfaces outside of Jerusalem.

Matthew 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather **fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**

Luke 12:5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: **Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.**

Revelation 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; **He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.**

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years... 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 **And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.**

Revelation 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, **shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.**

A few points are worth making in regard to the four details outlined above.

To begin with, the third and fourth points provide the explanatory details regarding the means of death discussed in the first and second points. In other words, when the New Testament states either that unbelievers will die in their sin or that unbelievers will be denied eternal life, it means that they will be kept out of the kingdom and placed into the Lake of Fire. (John 5:29, Matthew 25:41, Luke 20:35-36, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 1:6, and Revelation 20:4-15 clearly teach that wicked angels are kept alive in chains in hell and that at the end of Christ's millennial reign all wicked men will be resurrected, made immortal like angels, counted among the devil's angels, and sent to the Lake of Fire. Consequently, their death is not a denial of resurrection or immortality, nor a cessation of existence. The immortality of angels and the fact that such angels must be kept in chains are but a few of the evidences which demonstrate that this punishment does not entail the cessation of existence. Rather, it entails expulsion from God's presence and God's kingdom to live eternally in the Lake of Fire.)

In addition, both the form and the manner of death prescribed in the New Covenant differ from the death prescribed in the Law of Moses in a way that directly relates to the issue of grace and forgiveness. Peter comments directly on this in his second epistle when he describes the fiery destruction of the wicked that will occur when Jesus returns. He reminds his audience that the seemingly long timeframe before this event serves to allow men time to repent and be delivered from this cataclysm.

2 Peter 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come **in the last days scoffers**, walking after their own lusts, 4 **And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation...**7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, **reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men...**9 **The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**

With regard to the particular details concerning the use of death as a penalty, the differences between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant can be summarized as follows. Unlike the death prescribed in the Law of Moses, the death prescribed in the New Covenant was not a form of regularly practiced, contemporary societal discipline. To the contrary, whether the annihilation of the wicked by Christ at his return or the Second Death in particular, these are climactic events that unfold only at particular events in history. And more importantly, while the Law of Moses required immediate death for the guilty, the death prescribed in the New Covenant would occur only at the end of the age when Christ returned, which inherently created a significant period of time in which individual sinners could believe, repent, be forgiven, and avoid receiving the punishment of death. This extended opportunity for repentance is critical to the dispensing of forgiveness and atonement to the sinner and explains why, even with the inclusion of a death penalty, the New Covenant remains an institution dispensing grace and forgiveness.

Number three, although the primary disciplinary method so prominently featured in the Law of Moses is death, the New Covenant replaces execution with the penalty of excommunication. We can see this very clearly from Jesus words in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. **16** But if he will not hear thee, *then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.* **17** And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. **18** Verily I say unto you, **Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.** **19** Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. **20** **For where two or three are gathered together (4863) in my name, there am I in the midst of them.**

Deuteronomy 17:6 **At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but** at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. **7** **The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death,** and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.

Deuteronomy 19:15 One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: **at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.**

Several items are worth noting here, many of which are expounded in fuller detail in our studies entitled, “Unity and Excommunication” and “Church Gatherings and Leadership.”

First, notice in particular, Jesus' insistence for two or three witnesses in order to condemn anyone and enact the punishment of excommunication. As seen in the quotations of Deuteronomy 17 and 19, this language concerning "two or three witnesses" is used specifically in the Law of Moses as the standard of evidence for executing anyone. In fact, Jesus' words in Matthew 18:16 are a direct quotation of Deuteronomy 19:15. Moreover, Hebrews 10 confirms the New Testament's recognition of the Law of Moses' protocol for two or three witnesses in order to put sinners to death.

Hebrews 10:28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses.

Paul turns and applies this same requirement for two or three witness for church discipline in such passages as 2 Corinthians 13:1-2 and 1 Timothy 5:19.

Second, although the punishment prescribed by Moses' Law is death, in Matthew 18:17 Jesus prescribes the punishment not of death but of expulsion from the church community.

Third, when applying these protocols to the Corinthians church, Paul reveals another measure of graciousness in the contrast between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant.

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. **2 And ye are puffed up,** and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. **3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed,** **4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together (4863), and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,** **5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh,** that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. **6 Your glorying *is* not good.** Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? **7 Purge out therefore the old leaven,** that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. **For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:** **8 Therefore let us keep the feast,** not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth. **9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company (4874) with fornicators:** **10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters;** for then must ye needs go out of the world. **11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company (4874), if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.** **12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?** **13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away (1808) from (1537) among yourselves that wicked person.**

In verses 3-4 Paul says three things that directly parallel Christ's instructions from Matthew 18. He commands that the procedure of excommunication should be conducted when the church gathers together. He states that this excommunication is carried out in the power of Christ. And similar to Christ's phrase that he is "there in the midst" when two or three gather together in his name, Paul states that although he is absent in body, yet he is present in spirit consenting to their actions. But the real intriguing aspect arrives when Paul returns to this same course of events in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 2:3 And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is *the joy* of you all. **4** For out of much affliction and anguish of heart **I wrote unto you** with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. **5** But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. **6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.** **7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him,** and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. **8** Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm *your* love toward him. **9** For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. **10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ.**

Here in verse 10, Paul once again refers to Christ's language in Matthew 18 with the phrase "To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ." But more importantly, now Paul urges that the sinner who was previously excommunicated should be accepted back into the church and forgiven. In other words, the disciplinary measures in the New Covenant are so gracious that they even allow for forgiveness to those who have been excommunicated so long as they turn from the sin.

Because the New Covenant replaces execution with excommunication (a form of punishment that allows for future repentance and forgiveness) it can still be regarded as gracious and forgiving even though it contains disciplinary measures. In short, unlike the Law of Moses, the New Testament's predominant disciplinary measure did not immediately shut down all possibility for future repentance, forgiveness, and avoidance of the punishment. Therefore, it could not be regarded as devoid of grace and forgiveness.

Number four, the provisional forgiveness of sins that was available during the Law of Moses only resulted in a temporary postponement of death. Without access to the tree of life, mortal man (whether he sinned or not) would eventually die. Receiving the temporary atonement that was available through the priestly system at the time of the Law of Moses did absolutely nothing to deliver those who had been forgiven from this eventual, inevitable death.

On the other hand, the New Testament makes repeated assertions associating the graciousness of the New Covenant with the reception of immortal (eternal) life from the Spirit, forever delivering man from subjection to death. (The points outlined below are spelled out in greater detail in our “Born Again Study.”)

In the New Testament, Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would be initially received by his followers on the day of Pentecost in a certain, more limited measure but ultimately that the Holy Spirit would “well up” to produce eternal life or immortality in his followers.

John 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but **the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.**

John 7:37 In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, **Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. 38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. 39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)**

In fact, shortly before these words in chapters 4 and 7, John 3 records a longer conversation between Jesus and the Jewish leader named Nicodemus. In this discourse, Jesus asserts four crucial details. First, he asserts the need to be born of the Spirit of God in order to enter the kingdom of God. Second, he asserts the axiom, “that which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of spirit is spirit.” Third, Jesus employs the imagery of earthly and heavenly things to convey his meaning. And fourth, in verses 15-16 he connects being born of the Spirit of God to everlasting life.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.** 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** 6 **That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 **If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?** 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 **That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have**

eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Paul repeats these same four crucial elements in 1 Corinthians 15. First, we note that in verse 50 Paul states that we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven as mere flesh and blood. Second, we note that verses 44-46 reflect Jesus' axiomatic declaration, "that which is of flesh is flesh and that which is of spirit is spirit." Third, in verses 48-49 Paul borrows Jesus' use of earthly and heavenly imagery. And fourth, Paul connects the reception of the spiritual body (verse 44) with the everlasting life of immortality in verses 53-57. In fact, in verses 56-57 Paul even directly contrasts this spiritual gift of immortality (ultimate victory over death) to the graceless prescription of death found in the Law of Moses.

1 Corinthians 15:42 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 44 **It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.** 45 And so it is written, **The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit.** 46 **Howbeit that *was* not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.** 47 The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven. 48 **As *is* the earthy, such *are* they also that are earthy: and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly.** 49 **And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.** 50 **Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.** 51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and **we shall be changed.** 53 **For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.** 54 **So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.** 55 O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? 56 **The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.** 57 **But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Many other passages could be cited on this topic. But clearly both Jesus and Paul connected the reception of the Spirit ultimately with the transformation of our bodies, making them immortal so that we live forever.

And in this light, we notice how frequently the New Testament refers to either receiving the Holy Spirit as a gift or equates God's grace with our receiving eternal life by the Spirit. Below we have listed only the most explicit passages testifying to these facts but many others could have been listed (including Acts 2:38, 10:45, 11:15-17, Ephesians 2:5-6, 3:6-7, 2 Thessalonians 2:16, Hebrews 2:9-10, 1 Peter 1:10-13, 5:10.) Notice in particular how clearly Romans 8 reflects

Jesus' teaching in John 3 about being born of God's Spirit and connects that to immortality, which we wait for.

Romans 5:17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more **they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.**..20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. **But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: 21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life** by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for **ye are not under the law, but under grace.** 15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, **but under grace?** God forbid...22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, **and the end everlasting life.** 23 For the wages of sin is death; **but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Romans 8:10 And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but **the Spirit is life** because of righteousness. 11 **But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead** dwell in you, **he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.** 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, **not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.** 13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are **the sons of God...** 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 23 And not only *they*, but **ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.** 24 **For we are saved by hope:** but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? 25 But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we **with patience wait for it.**

2 Timothy 1:6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up **the gift of God**, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. 7 **For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.** 8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; 9 **Who hath saved us, and called us** with an holy calling, not according to our works, but **according to his own purpose and grace**, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, 10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour **Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality** to light through the gospel.

Titus 3:7 That **being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as **being heirs together of the grace of life**; that your prayers be not hindered.

Jude 1:20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, **21** Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for **the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life**.

We see in these passages the frequent connection that the New Testament makes between God's grace and the gift of immortal life by God's Spirit. Consequently, forgiveness under the New Covenant was far more gracious than the much more limited, provisional forgiveness available during the Law of Moses because under the New Covenant, forgiveness meant total deliverance from death not just temporary postponement of death. While a temporary postponement of death was certainly gracious for the sinner, it did not ultimately deliver the sinner from the death penalty he had acquired by sinning. Consequently, the New Covenant was actually providing the gift which could never actually be given under the Law of Moses, permanent deliverance from the punishment of death. And in this way also, the Law of Moses is seen as inevitably graceless while the New Covenant delivers grace unceasingly.

In summary, we began this section by asking why the New Covenant is not characterized as a graceless punitive governing institution in the same way that the Law of Moses is. We have arrived at the following reasons.

First, unlike the Law of Moses, under the New Covenant it is impossible to separate the role of priestly intercession from punitive government. The Law of Moses itself codified the preexisting conceptual and historical separation between the offices of intercessory priests and the authority of punishing judges and kings, but the New Testament vested both roles in one person, Jesus Christ. Even in passages like Matthew 18:15-20 and 28:18-20 depict the church's authority to teach and discipline members who disobey that teaching as rooted directly in Christ's authority. Since there is no way to institutionally separate the priestly intercession of Christ from the authority to carry out punitive aspects of the New Covenant which is also vested in Christ, unlike the Law of Moses the New Covenant cannot be described as primarily or essentially a punitive governing institution devoid of grace.

In addition, the details concerning the use of death as a penalty draw a glaring distinction between the grace of the New Covenant and the gracelessness of the Law of Moses. And from these details emerge the remaining four reasons.

Second, the Law of Moses restricted its provisional forgiveness to only certain types of sin. On the other hand, the New Covenant allowed forgiveness for all types of sin.

Third, unlike the Law of Moses, which required the exercise of the death penalty to be immediate and allowed no time or opportunity for repentance and

forgiveness, the New Covenant implements death as a punishment for sin only at the end of age when Christ physically returns to rule and the saints are made immortal. This allows significant time for individual repentance and forgiveness.

Fourth, in the interim prior to the return of Christ, the New Covenant replaces execution with excommunication as the regular form of discipline and punishment within the community of the saints on earth and even allows forgiveness for those who repent after excommunication.

And fifth, because mankind is mortal, the provisional forgiveness under the Law of Moses only provided temporary postponement of death. Only the New Covenant facilitates the resurrection and transformation of men, making them immortal and forever redeeming them from the punishment of death as well as enabling them to eternally inherit the promises God gave to Abraham. In other words, the New Covenant delivers the very grace (the eternal gifts) that the Law of Moses never could.

Consequently, despite the inclusion of punishment and even death as a penalty under both Law of Moses and the New Covenant, the New Covenant cannot be characterized as devoid of grace and forgiveness in the way that the Law of Moses necessarily is. Likewise, unlike the Law of Moses which is distinguished from priestly service and the effectiveness of Christ's atoning sacrifice, the New Covenant is inherently synonymous with the priestly service of Christ which graciously provides atonement and forgiveness of sins.

General Study Conclusions

In summary, we have seen that Old Testament books such as Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers make frequent references to atonement and forgiveness of sins by means of animal sacrifice. Yet we have also seen the Jewish authors of the New Testament repeatedly describe the Law of Moses as a without grace, not dispensing forgiveness, not operating based upon faith, as an instrument for disseminating death and other penalties, and as requiring flawless obedience on all points. Moreover, these Jewish men were familiar with the Law of Moses as demonstrated by their frequent quotation of Old Testament texts and they also participated in Temple sacrifices during their own lifetimes while the Temple was still standing.

The reason such knowledgeable Jewish men could describe the Law of Moses in this way was because they saw the Law of Moses primarily as a legal governing institution parallel to the laws and governments of other nations. As such, it governed all aspects of Jewish society including things which had independent, distinct existence apart from the Law of Moses, such as the ancient institutions of marriage, labor, and even the sacrificial priesthood, each of which was established in the early days of Genesis long before Moses. Consequently, just like any civil government presides over pre-existing societal institutions, the arrival of the Law of Moses enveloped and necessarily contained commands pertaining to these pre-

existing institutions. However, due to the pre-existence of these societal institutions and the defining concept of the Law of Moses as a form of societal government, the Law of Moses could be conceived of and discussed without invoking or automatically including these pre-existing institutions, particularly the sacrificial priesthood.

Moreover, the commands pertaining to priestly sacrifice in the Law of Moses (and, in fact, the entirely priestly system) were seen as precursors or temporarily provisions accepted in anticipation of Christ's sacrifice. Consequently, whether the Law of Moses was discussed solely as a societal government or whether the Law of Moses was discussed in relation to those who rejected Christ, it could be described as devoid of atonement or forgiveness and as requiring unflinching obedience without grace or mercy.

Ultimately, it is only the institutionally distinct pre-existence of the sacrificial priesthood, the Law of Moses' categorical parallel to other national governments, and the predictive provisional nature of the priestly sacrificial system that allow the New Testament authors to characterize the Law of Moses so frequently and decisively as devoid of grace and forgiveness. Apart from these three, closely-related historical facts, it would have been impossible to paint the contrast between the New Covenant and the Law of Moses in such stark terms as we find in the New Testament.

In other words, without these three factors, we should have expected to find both the Law of Moses and the New Covenant depicted as dispensing punishment and death as well as grace, forgiveness, and mercy on the shared basis of blood sacrifices. But even though both covenants contain each of these components, the three factors listed above combined with the difference in degree in certain critical respects (such as the number of commands, timing and opportunity for repentance, and restrictions on forgiveness and priestly service) as well as certain outright differences (such as the fusing of judicial and priestly roles in Christ Jesus and the manner of regular discipline among the saints) creates the sharp contrast that we see so frequently characterized in stark terms throughout the New Testament.

Furthermore, two additional caveats inexorably result from this analysis. First, the presence of such frequent, absolute characterizations of the Law of Moses by the Jewish authors of the New Testament themselves deeply affirm the pre-existence of the priestly system prior to the Law of Moses and the firmly rooted conceptual separation between the two in Jewish understanding by the time of the first century AD. And second, the meticulous details of New Testament statements concerning the role of grace under the Law of Moses and the New Covenant prohibit any oversimplified, stark philosophical explanations or distinctions between the two systems, such as those articulated under Calvinism.